UK London airports to be hit by strikes; unofficial go-slow at South African ports; Zimbabwe public sector strike threat

Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

19 July 2019

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

UK workers at London's Heathrow airport to strike

Around 4,000 UK workers, including security staff, engineers and passenger service staff at Heathrow airport, are to hold six days of strikes. They will coincide with the start of school holidays and one of the busiest periods at the airport.

The strikes, set to begin on July 26, with further two-day strikes on August 5 and August 23, are in response to an 18-month pay offer by their employer of just 2.7 percent—meaning low paid staff only receiving an extra £3.75 a day. Workers are angry that the pay for Heathrow boss John Holland-Kaye doubled last year to £4.2 million and billions in dividends were paid out to shareholders.

Stansted airport will also be affected by industrial action. Around 40 Unite union members working for Stobart Aviation Services have announced a series of 17 strike days. The dates are July 25 to July 29, August 2 to 5, August 9 to 12, August 16 to 19 and August 23 to 27. The company provides passenger agency services to the Easyjet airline, which would be hit by the dispute. The workers are taking action because other companies at the site are paying their staff 20 percent more for equivalent duties.

Staff at London government department office begin indefinite strike

Catering and cleaning staff in London at the UK government's Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) began an indefinite strike on Monday.

They are employed by outsourcing companies ISS and Aramark. The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) members have been carrying out a prolonged struggle, including strikes, over the last nine months to be paid the London Living Wage—currently set at £10.55 an hour.

On July 22, staff contracted to provide security, portering and postal services at the BEIS office are due to begin a five-day walk out over pay. Receptionists employed by ISS at the BEIS office will be balloted beginning July 29 with a view to taking action in August.

PCS members held a rally in London on Wednesday evening in opposition to outsourcing. Those taking part included the BEIS strikers, striking workers from the northwest of England, and staff working for Interserve at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who have taken 11 days of action over pay and union recognition.

Strike by outsourced staff at tax office in northwest England

Cleaners at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (tax) offices in Liverpool and Bootle in northwest England held a two-day strike beginning Monday.

The Public and Commercial Services union members are employed by the ISS outsourcing company. They took the action against low pay, poor working conditions and insecure employment. A rally in support of the strikers was held Monday lunchtime in Liverpool city centre.

Food processing workers strike in Hull, UK

Workers at Karro Foods in Hull, England walked out Tuesday from 4.30am till 10pm, with plans for further strikes each Monday for the next three weeks. The site employs around 150 permanent staff and 200 agency workers.

The GMB union members are seeking a 50 pence an hour pay rise. Last week, Karro workers in Malton, North Yorkshire held a two-day unofficial stoppage over the 50p an hour pay claim.

Pharmacy support workers in Scottish Tayside area to strike

Pharmacy support staff working for the Tayside National Health Service Trust in north-east Scotland have voted by a 90 percent majority to take indefinite industrial action beginning August 19 and to impose an overtime ban.

The Unite union members are protesting a botched job evaluation programme, which left workers on pay grades lower than they should be. The union is in ongoing talks with Tayside NHS management and hopes

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to resolve the issue.

Health visitors in Lincolnshire, England strike

On Monday, 58 health visitors employed by Lincolnshire county council in east England began a 48-hour stoppage. They are also due to hold a 24-hour strike today with another planned for July 22. It is the first ever strike by health visitors in the county.

The Unite union members are taking action to protest pay rates and erosion of responsibilities. They used to be employed directly by the NHS but were transferred to the county council in October 2017 and reckon they are paid around £2,000 less than prior to their transfer.

They held a demonstration outside the council's offices on Monday.

Retail distribution workers at southeast UK site to strike

Workers at the Sainsbury's distribution centre at Waltham Point in Essex, England are to hold a 24-hour strike on July 25.

The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) members are taking action to protest changes in attendance policy imposed by the company. USDAW states the changes will mean workers signed off sick could quickly lose sick pay entitlement, leaving them financially insecure. On June 27, around 100 staff at the site held a 24-hour stoppage over the issue.

Workers at Welsh paint factory to strike

Workers at the Valspar paint production factory in Deeside, Flint in North Wales will begin an overtime ban on July 29, with a 48-hour strike on August 11. The Unite union members are protesting unpaid wages for work done.

The issue was originally raised in 2018. The union and company were to hold talks Wednesday under the auspices of government mediation service, Acas.

Protest by UK ambulance workers over retirement age plans

Ambulance workers and paramedics held a demonstration outside the UK Department of Health (DoH) headquarters in London on Tuesday. The DoH plans to make ambulance staff work until they are 68 years old. The job takes a physical and mental toll on workers, who want to retire at 60 in line with police and firefighters.

Further talks on Irish health dispute over job evaluation

Irish health workers, including health care assistants, maternity care assistants, laboratory aides, technicians, portering and catering staff, are in dispute over the failure of the Irish government to fund pay increases resulting from a job evaluation exercise.

Around 10,000 health workers held a 24-hour strike on June 26 over the Health Service Executive's (HSE) refusal to pay the up to €3,000 owed to the workers as a result of the job evaluation.

A planned three-day strike at the beginning of July was called off by the Services, Industrial, Professionals and Technical Union (SIPTU) in favour of talks under the auspices of the Labour Court.

SIPTU said strikes may resume after next week. The Labour Court is due to reconvene its meetings with SIPTU and HSE on July 22.

Overtime ban by Irish psychiatric nurses called off

On July 13, the Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) in Ireland called off an overtime ban begun July 11. The 6,000 PNA members had begun the protest over the Health Service Executive's (HSE) failure to recruit and retain staff. Talks between HSE and the PNA have been taking place this week.

Rally by Irish postal workers to oppose job losses

Postal workers employed by the Irish state postal service, An Post are to hold a rally on Saturday. The rally is to protest the planned closure of the An Post Cork facility at Little Island. The closure, which is due between September and March 2020, would mean the loss of 216 out of the workforce of 240.

Indefinite strike by port workers at Romanian port called off

An indefinite strike by workers at grain silos in the Black Sea port of Constanta due to begin Monday was called off by the Trans-Connex union after employer ADM offered a pay increase. ADM North Star Shipping employs around 600 staff in Romania.

Middle East

Israeli diplomats protest budget cuts

In protest at budget cuts to the Foreign Ministry, diplomats are boycotting logistical planning for Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's upcoming overseas trips. Last month, the Israeli government cut the Foreign Ministry budget by $333 million. Israeli embassy staff will also refuse to issue diplomatic passports to ministers and members of parliament.

In 2014, diplomats struck in protest over wages and budget issues. They also held a strike in 2016 over delays in paying agreed compensation.

South African port workers unofficial go-slow made illegal

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The two-week go-slow by employees at South Africa's major port, Ngqura Container Terminal, Port Elizabeth has been made illegal. A court injunction was awarded to Transnet, which is responsible for running the state-owned port authorities.

Several workers were suspended and the rest of the workforce ordered by the court to increase their productivity.

Workers are protesting the lack of promotions and incentives. Large scale "absenteeism" and mechanical breakdowns are also said to be impacting on the berthing and export of goods at Port Durban.

Car and citrus fruit exports among others were severely disrupted. Volkswagen stopped production at three shifts, losing nearly two thirds of its production quota, when it ran out of its supply of components dependent on just-in-time delivery systems.

The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union previously lead a strike at the port in May but said it was not responsible for the present dispute.

South African security guards demonstrate to demand full-time employment

Unemployed security guards demonstrated in the city centre of Port Elizabeth July 11 to demand permanent employment at the South African municipality.

The 100 unemployed workers, previously employed through a contractor, are among 550 who have not been offered inhouse jobs. The municipality previously made 600 guards permanent.

A meeting held with the Port Elizabeth authorities ended without resolving the guards' demands.

3,700 guards are also waiting in Johannesburg to be brought on to the books, deferred from July until October.

South African local residents close mine to demand promised jobs

Hundreds of South African residents from the Phosa and Ogies eMalahleni, townships in Mpumalanga closed a mine demanding the mining company commits to its quota of local resident employment.

Five hundred residents blockaded roads on July 10 to and from the Goedgevonden mine, demanding the employer meets a commitment to employ 30 percent of employees from the local population. The mine was brought to a standstill as Goedgevonden management refused talks.

A spokesman for the residents said, "We just want to know from them what we need to do to get hired, to get opportunities to improve our lives."

Adult unemployment in South Africa officially stands at 27.6 percent and among 15 to 24-year-olds is 55 percent.

Zimbabwe public sector strike threat over government pay offer

Zimbabwe public sector workers are threatening to strike in opposition to the government's pay offer.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government has offered a 50 percent pay increase to the public sector and a cost of living monthly increase. But with inflation at 175 percent, wages have fallen in value from US $475 in 2009 to US $47 a month for the lowest paid worker the past year—equivalent to the cost of a tyre.

Public sector unions planned a march to the Ministry of Finance Tuesday to forward a wage demand of around $US470 a month—threatening a stay-away from work by workers starting Wednesday.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions claim its leaders have been sent bullets through the post in letters threatening attacks from mercenaries. This in response to stay away action proposed for July 22 to protest the government replacing the use of multi-currencies with the Zimbabwe dollar, which continues to fall.

Zimbabwe has gone from being one of the richest countries in Africa to now being considered for food aid. At least 59 percent of the population, around 5.5 million inhabitants, are considered near starvation.

Zimbabwe miners demand further pay increase to offset runaway inflation

Zimbabwe diamond miners are demanding another pay increase, as inflation has eroded the 80 percent raise achieved earlier this year.

Wages have been reviewed 14 times since 2009 to 2018, with an overall wage increase says the Chamber of Mines (CoM) of 780 percent. This still leaves miners poverty stricken.

The CoM has rejected appeals from Associated Mine Workers Union of Zimbabwe, claiming it can only afford a small pay rise because of the impact of power outages on production.

Kenyan teachers' union threaten industrial action against employer's rejection of court decision

The Kenyan teachers' union is threatening to call a strike if employers do not implement the decisions of the Labour and Employment Relations Court.

The court judgement cancelled further implementation of the 2017 to 2021 collective bargaining agreement, incorporating a 13 billion shillings pay increase for 160,000 senior level education employees.

The TSC lost a court application made in January to base promotions on competitive interviews and to send trade union branch officials into different locations around the country away from their members.

The Kenyan National Union of Teachers says it will bring teachers out of the classroom if the TSC attempts to reverse the decision through appeal.

Malawi teachers sit-in strike over lack of pay

Malawian teachers have begun a sit-in strike at the country's universities, demanding to be paid.

The 333 teachers were employed by the universities in April this year but have not been paid for four months.

A spokesperson for the teachers said their demands have been ignored by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

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